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Female wards, feminism, and mentorship in *Mansfield Park* and *Jane Eyre*

by

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A thesis submitted to the graduate faculty
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This is to certify that the master’s thesis of
Miranda McCullick
has met the thesis requirements of Iowa State University

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Introduction

Bold, outspoken, and independent, Charlotte Brontë’s Jane Eyre has gained recognition as one of the strongest examples of a feminist heroine in the canon of women’s literature. While a few critics try to make the case that Jane is not, in fact, deserving of this title, most typically reinforce the assessment that Jane is an excellent example of early feminism. Contrastingly, Jane Austen’s Fanny Price is not so easily awarded this distinction. At least as often as a critic determines that she does ultimately display qualities of a feminist heroine, another determines that she ultimately succumbs to and reinforces patriarchal values.

Interestingly, while Fanny Price and Jane Eyre provoke very different reactions to their qualifications as feminist heroines, a remarkable number of similarities exist between the two novels. Kathryn Sutherland points out some of these similarities in the plots and themes of the two novels and suggests that Mansfield Park is an “unrecognized . . . source” for Jane Eyre(411). Among these like themes, Sutherland notes:

both concentrate on the ambiguous ordination of an unattractive female outsider, a poor cousin, into a
full and privileged identity, which is a compounded moral and economic security. 420

Sutherland also suggests parallels between the characters of Edmund and St. John and between the characters of Henry Crawford and Mr. Rochester. In addition to these similarities that Sutherland notes, both novels begin following their heroines at age ten. Both contain a spiteful aunt, in the forms of Aunt Norris and Mrs. Reed, who heaps abuse upon the heroine. Both heroines have two spoiled female cousins, Maria and Julia Bertram and Georgiana and Eliza Reed, and both heroines have a male cousin, Tom Bertram and John Reed, who is indulged by his parents and who eventually carouses himself to death, or nearly to death. Perhaps most significant to the examination of Fanny and Jane as feminist heroines is their similar status as female wards within a patriarchal culture.

Both Fanny and Jane live during a time of patriarchal dominance yet, as wards, come of age in households in which they are separated from their own fathers. Within these households they are treated as outsiders and are forced to defend themselves against emotional and physical abuse in the absence of a patriarchal protector. While the lack of patriarchal protection and provision in many ways leaves the heroines in difficult circumstances, it also provides them
with opportunities for freedom from patriarchal oppression. Protection and provision never came without a price for nineteenth-century women; their complete dependence upon men for safety, social status, and economic support created situations of extreme inequality in which wives and daughters were expected to defer to the patriarch’s authority and judgment. The absence of their own fathers thus allows the heroines opportunities to develop a sense of independence and self-reliance. For Fanny, this opportunity is somewhat more limited because she does have a distanced relationship with a patriarch, Sir Thomas, in the home in which she comes of age. However, this opportunity still exists for her since Sir Thomas fails to treat her as his own daughter. It seems, then, that Austen and Brontë chose female wards as their heroines at least in part because their positions as women without a patriarch gives them opportunities to achieve levels of autonomy uncharacteristic of women in their society.

Such an opportunity for autonomy is obviously important in categorizing a heroine as feminist. However, Adrienne Rich points out that positive relationships between women are also highly important in establishing a sense of feminism. Rich suggests in “Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence” that all positive relationships between women are threatening
to patriarchal oppression since such bonds demonstrate that relationships with men are not women's sole priority. Rich discusses the importance of female relationships, and particularly female mentoring relationships further in "Motherhood and Daughterhood." Rich writes, "Until a strong line of love, confirmation, and example stretches from mother to daughter, from woman to woman across the generations, women will still be wandering in the wilderness" (246). Rich specifies that while such nurturing is necessary for all women, this relationship can, and often has occurred with "nonbiological mothers, who have combined a care for the practical values of survival with an incitement toward further horizons, a compassion for vulnerability with an insistence on buried strengths" (247). Such mentors encourage independence from patriarchy and provide other women with a sense of nurturing and acceptance. Rich suggests that true feminism, then, is a marriage of attaining independence for oneself and creating supportive relationships with other women. In light of this, an assessment of Fanny and Jane as feminist heroines requires an examination of their abilities to be supportive of other female characters, particularly with those characters they have opportunities to mentor, Susan and Adèle.
Fanny and Jane’s positions as female wards present unique challenges and opportunities in meeting this second qualification of a feminist heroine. Since being female wards, of course, means separation from their mothers as well as their fathers, Fanny and Jane are deprived of the comfort and guidance of the woman who would typically serve as their first female mentor. However, for Jane, at least other opportunities for being mentored exist. Both heroines, while perhaps disadvantaged by this early lack of maternal guidance, through this lack, are placed in a position to be especially empathetic toward younger women who display a similar need for female guidance and affection.

In examining Fanny and Jane as feminist heroines, it seems that their positions as female wards provides them some unique opportunities in their early distance from patriarchy and in their ability to relate to a sense of yearning for female mentorship and acceptance. Assessing Fanny and Jane as feminist heroines will require an analysis of how well these characters are able to utilize these unique positions to meet both requirements of a feminist heroine: achieving a sense of independence for herself and providing support and acceptance for other women.
Mansfield Park

Timid, shy, self-denying, and frail, Fanny Price seems, to many readers, an unlikely feminist heroine. Yet, her reliance on her own judgment and her willingness to stand up for her personal convictions lend support to readers who find Fanny to possess admirable qualities. Understandably, critical responses to this complicated character have varied widely. Some critics, including Margaret Kirkham, Anna Despotopoulou, and Jacqueline Reid-Walsh, view Fanny Price as a highly feminist character who, in spite of her timid nature, offers a unique challenge to patriarchal authority. Other critics, such as Anna Mae Duane and Bernard Paris, find that Fanny is unable to overcome the debilitating effects of her abuse and the novel ultimately reinforces traditional values. While these studies have examined many important aspects of Fanny's character development, none have focused on the significance of her mentoring relationship with Susan and the implications of this relationship in examining Fanny as a feminist heroine. If we define a "feminist heroine" as one who both asserts her own independence and builds supportive relationships with other women, evaluating Fanny Price as such necessitates both a review of the degree to which she achieves autonomy herself and an examination of the ways in which she
offers support to her sister Susan through her role as Susan's mentor.

Perhaps one of the reasons critical opinions about Fanny's character vary so widely lies in the complexity of her difficult childhood situation and her responses to it. Joan Klingel Ray recognizes these complexities and explores them in her article “Jane Austen's Case Study of Child Abuse: Fanny Price.” Ray offers a detailed discussion of the ways in which Fanny is physically, materially, and emotionally abused and neglected in both the Bertram and the Price homes. Ray suggests that Mrs. Norris physically abuses the sickly Fanny "by taxing her beyond her endurance" (20). Ray explains that material abuse "includes failing to supply the child with . . . sufficient protection from the cold" and suggests that Fanny suffers such abuse when Mrs. Norris and the Bertrams fail to provide her with a fire in her room (17). As Ray notes, Fanny is also obviously emotionally abused by the Bertrams and especially by Mrs. Norris. Ray states that Fanny's immediate family also participates in "unintentional emotional abuse" by failing to provide her with the love and acceptance she needs (23).

Not surprisingly, the combination of these difficult experiences has debilitating effects on both Fanny's mental
and physical health. While Fanny’s shyness and timidity are probably somewhat innate characteristics of her personality, the abuse and neglect she suffers clearly intensifies her anxiety and makes her more withdrawn. Ray takes this position in examining Fanny’s responses to abuse. Ray explains that victims of child abuse may respond by becoming “uncommunicative, shy, excessively watchful, and unusually fearful” (17). She notes, “The cumulative experiences of her life since age ten exacerbate the eighteen-year-old Fanny’s inherently fearful sensitive nature” (23). Paris, conversely, implies that Fanny’s responses to situations are almost entirely determined by the “personally crippling defensive strategies” she develops in response to abuse and neglect (23). While his analysis is overly pessimistic in its denial of any possibility for Fanny to develop admirable qualities in spite of the abuse she faces, Paris aptly notes the influence her difficult childhood situations have in causing Fanny to feel “weak, worthless, inconsequential, and inadequate” (45). These types of emotional responses are certainly understandable in light of the disempowered status that others continually force upon Fanny.

This abuse and neglect also produces negative effects on Fanny’s physical health. Just as Fanny probably has innate
personality traits that lead her to be timid and shy, Fanny may have a tendency toward ill health that is unrelated to abuse or neglect. However, the stress produced by her emotional abuse certainly exacerbates her physical weaknesses. Anna Mae Duane explores the interconnectedness of Fanny’s ill health and her desire for love and acceptance. Duane explains, “To display the ‘extraordinary degree of gratitude’ required of her, Fanny must assess the needs of others, and then act as if their often painful wishes and demands represent her own inner desires” (409). Duane suggests that this self-denial produces a “perpetual state of anxiety” that compromises Fanny’s mental and physical health (405). John Wiltshire also discusses the connections between Fanny’s poor physical health and the emotional strains she faces: “Fanny Price’s stressors include alienation from a (minimally) supportive family background, inferior social status, her consciousness of which is repeatedly re-enforced, and an affection [for Edmund] which is socially impermissible. . . These stresses are driven back into and played out in her body” (72). As one would expect, the abuse Fanny endures certainly produces negative effects both on her mind and her body. However, in spite of these difficult situations, Fanny is able to develop a sense of autonomy.
Fanny’s strongest assertion of independence is her refusal to marry Henry Crawford in spite of the pressure placed upon her by Sir Thomas, Henry, and Edmund. Each of these characters tries to convince Fanny that she cannot think for herself, that her decision to refuse Henry must not be rational, and that they know her feelings better than she does. They try to convince her that they know what is best for her, and that her own judgment on the matter is inconsequential. In resisting these persuasive patriarchal forces in favor of her own better judgment, Fanny’s strongest opponent is Sir Thomas. While Henry and Edmund try to convince Fanny of the desirableness of the union through gentle insistence, Sir Thomas tries to impose his will upon Fanny more forcefully. When she tells him that she cannot marry Henry because she “cannot like him . . . well enough to marry him,” Sir Thomas suggests to her, “you do not quite know your own feelings” (273). When she quietly insists that she does know her own feelings, he becomes perplexed and eventually angry with her. He scolds her:

I had thought you peculiarly free from wilfulness of temper, self-conceit, and every tendency to that independence of spirit, which prevails so much in modern days, even in young women, and which in young
women is offensive and disgusting beyond all common offense. But you have now shewn me that you can be wilful and perverse, that you can and will decide for yourself. (275)

Fanny responds to Sir Thomas's accusations by "crying . . . bitterly" and apologizing, but she stays firm in her conviction that her decision is right. She may fear Sir Thomas's displeasure, but she does not allow that fear to dictate her decision.

Although Henry is gentler in his insistence on the union, like Sir Thomas, he refuses to acknowledge Fanny's opinion on the subject. After Sir Thomas informs Henry of Fanny's feelings concerning the proposal, he continues to believe she will eventually accept him. Austen writes:

He had vanity, which strongly inclined him, in the first place, to think she did love him, though she might not know it herself; and which, secondly, when constrained at last to admit that she did know her own present feelings, convinced him that he should be able in time to make those feelings what he wished. (282)

In spite of the fact that Fanny tries to explain to him that she does not want to marry him and never will, he persists in
ignoring and minimizing her feelings. He continues to pursue her in spite of the fact that she "intreat[s] him never to mention [the proposal] again" (283), and he thoroughly believes he will succeed in convincing her to relinquish her own judgment in favor of his wants. Henry only abandons his pursual of Fanny after his affair with Maria makes their union clearly impossible.

Even Edmund contributes to the pressure placed on Fanny to accept Henry. While he tells Fanny that he approves of her decision not to marry without love, he tries to persuade her to develop feelings for Henry. Edmund encourages her, "Let him succeed at last" (301). Fanny responds, "Oh! never, never, never; he never will succeed with me" (301). Just as Sir Thomas and Henry have done, Edmund discounts Fanny's judgment in the matter, telling her, "Never, Fanny, so very determined and positive! This is not like yourself, your rational self" (301). Edmund thus discounts her feelings and her uncustomary assertiveness in expressing them as being irrational. Edmund's discounting of her feelings has the most powerful impact on Fanny, causing her to temporarily lose ground in asserting her position. She replies, "I mean . . . I think I never shall return his regard" (301). In the remainder of their conversation, Edmund tries to convince
Fanny that her own opinions concerning Henry are mistaken. Fanny tries to explain that some of her misgivings concerning Henry are related to his flirtatious behavior toward Maria when she was engaged to Mr. Rushworth. Edmund dismisses this and every other just objection Fanny has in refusing Henry and continues to try to persuade Fanny of the advantages of the marriage. Fanny listens to Edmund, but maintains her own opinions and tries to explain her reasoning to Edmund. Although Edmund refuses to accept Fanny’s decision, the fact that Fanny relies on her own judgment rather than Edmund’s testifies to the strength of her own independence of thought. While Sir Thomas, Henry, and Edmund all refuse to fully hear her or acknowledge her judgment, her persistence in refusing Henry despite her lack of support demonstrates a surprising level of autonomy.

Some critics suggest that Fanny is able to achieve this level of independence precisely because of her marginal status. For instance, Ray suggests that Fanny’s “dogged determination not to be charmed by the suave Henry Crawford” is a result of “extreme willfulness observed in some victims of child abuse” (24). Souter suggests, “As an indigent niece, that is, poor and female and not the closest of relations, she sees herself as cut loose . . . from the first requirement of
a woman in patriarchy, that she bring credit to her male relatives" (211). Reid-Walsh also sees Fanny as having a unique opportunity to challenge the patriarchal structure because of her position of being a part of the Bertram family without really belonging to it. She explains, "Fanny is allowed to learn what the Miss Bertrams learn on the fringes of their school-room society, and her insignificance lends her relative mental freedom to think in her own way" (131-132).

In pointing out the unique freedom from patriarchy her position offers her, these critics do not ignore the traumatic effects of her marginal status within her own home. Rather, they recognize the complex and paradoxical results of Fanny's difficult situation. Her marginal status both endangers her mental and physical well-being and provides her with a unique opportunity to challenge those who seemingly have authority over her.

Sir Thomas's response to Fanny's refusal provides further support for such readings. He tells Fanny that had Maria or Julia refused a man like Mr. Crawford without consulting him, he "should have thought it a gross violation of duty and respect" (276). He tells her, "You are not to be judged by the same rule. You do not owe me the duty of a child" (276). While he makes such statements out of anger, he is correct.
Fanny does not owe him the duty of a child. She is a woman in a patriarchal society without a strong connection to a patriarch. She is free to decide for herself in spite of whatever pressures Sir Thomas and others might try to place on her. While Fanny does not display this sense of assertiveness often, she does quietly assert her independence when faced with a decision that will determine the entire course of her future. Remarkably, Fanny is able to achieve this independence from patriarchal figures in spite of the fact that she lacks support from other women.

Throughout most of the novel, Fanny lacks any substantial relationships with other women. In fact, in some cases female characters are the most frequent contributors to Fanny’s torment. Mrs. Norris is obviously the clearest example of such a character. She is the person who most frequently berates and blames Fanny and who continually reinforces Fanny’s marginal status. While Lady Bertram comes to value Fanny as a companion, Austen clearly shows that Lady Bertram’s concern in this relationship is her own convenience rather than Fanny’s well being. This attitude is exemplified when Fanny first arrives at Mansfield Park, and Mrs. Norris, Maria, and Julia are engaged in a discussion over what they perceive as Fanny’s stupidity. Austen, describing Lady Bertram’s
comments on the subject, writes, "except her being so dull, . . . she saw no harm in the poor little thing—and always found her very handy and quick in carrying messages, and fetching what she wanted" (17). Lady Bertram’s attachment for Fanny grows as she begins to rely upon Fanny’s handiness, but this type of relationship is clearly not one that can offer Fanny genuine affection, support, or guidance. Julia and Maria never extend any sort of friendship to Fanny, and any potential friendship that might exist between Fanny and Mary Crawford is limited by their positions as rivals for Edmund. Even Fanny’s governess, Miss Lee, offers her little support. When Fanny first arrives at Mansfield Park, Miss Lee contributes to Fanny’s discomfort by “wonder[ing] at her ignorance” (13). Austen thus portrays Fanny as a young woman without strong connections with other women and without any sort of female mentorship.

While Fanny lacks any positive relationships with female characters during her time at Mansfield Park, her relationships with her brother, William, and with Edmund offer her some support and mentorship. Her relationship with William is clearly the most positive bond she sustains during her coming of age. While this relationship is primarily maintained through letter writing, it offers Fanny much needed
affection and encouragement. Fanny’s relationship with Edmund also offers her some love and support as well as moral guidance. Critics, such as Patricia Menon and Jacqueline Reid-Walsh have noted Edmund’s role as Fanny’s mentor. Reid-Walsh asserts that “despite his youth he is an excellent tutor according to the ideals of John Locke . . . a friend and companion who instructs through the power of mutual affection, not fear” (132). Menon sees the relationship between Edmund and Fanny much less positively. In discussing what she terms as the “lover-mentor” relationship, Menon describes Edmund as a well-intentioned but flawed mentor. She suggests that Edmund’s strength as a mentor lies in his “open expression” of kindness toward Fanny (151). However, she asserts that his “conventionality and emotional blindness” lead him to be inconsiderate toward Fanny at times (151). Thus while her relationship with Edmund provides Fanny with moral guidance and some level of love and belonging, it fails to provide her all the support she needs. Further, even had Edmund been a perfect mentor to Fanny, he still could not have offered her the same type of support that a female mentor could have. In discussing women’s need for female mentorship, Adrienne Rich explains that while “Men have been able to give us power, support, and certain forms of nurture, as individuals, when
they chose," women have a need for "a kind of strength which can only be one woman's gift to another" (246). Thus, Fanny's lack of female mentorship contributes to the disempowerment caused by her general lack of love and belonging, making assertiveness and independence from patriarchy even more difficult for Fanny to achieve. However, her own longing for supportive relationships seems to help her identify with her sister Susan, who displays a need for mentorship.

Although Fanny has lacked positive relationships with other female characters throughout most of her childhood and adolescence, she is able to develop a strong mentoring relationship with her younger sister Susan. Admittedly, while Fanny does reach autonomy by relying upon her own judgment in choosing a marriage partner, her timid, self-denying nature would seem to make her an unlikely candidate for guiding a young woman in fighting patriarchal power. However, Susan, whose personality and responses to neglect are vastly different from Fanny's, needs no help in developing an independent nature. Instead, Susan needs someone to offer her affection, support, and intellectual and moral guidance. Fanny's compassion and discernment make her well qualified to meet these needs as she forms a relationship with Susan. Fanny also makes an apt mentor for Susan because her own
experiences in childhood and adolescence help her to relate to Susan's need for love and belonging. However, their bond is not forged without some difficulties. Before Fanny can form a supportive relationship with Susan, she has to reevaluate her first impressions, overcome her discomfort with the differences in her and Susan's personalities, and recognize some of the causes behind Susan's behavior.

While Fanny has positive memories of her biological family, her reunification with them after an absence of more than eight years fails to generate a positive impression. Before Fanny visits the Prices, she anticipates a renewal of family bonds. In describing Fanny's contemplation of this reunion, Austen writes, "To be loved by so many, and more loved by all than she had ever been before, to feel affection without fear or restraint, to feel herself the equal of those who surrounded her. . . .This was a prospect to be dwelt on with a fondness that could be but half acknowledged" (320). Fanny obviously expects both to love and be loved in her parents' home, and most of all, she expects to find a sense of belonging with all members of her family. However, Austen soon shows that Fanny's expectations were somewhat unrealistic. When Fanny is first reunited with her biological family, she is stunned and disappointed at their general lack
of manners and apparent lack of affection for her and for each other.

While Susan is certainly not the person most responsible for creating this impression, she inadvertently contributes to Fanny’s discomfort. Part of this discomfort is created simply by the fact that Susan’s personality is very different from Fanny’s. While Fanny is quiet and timid, Susan is much more outspoken and assertive. This difference is first noted when Mrs. Price blames Susan for letting the fire wane. When Susan answers this accusation, Fanny is surprised at her “fearless, self-defending tone” (329). Fanny, who is used to enduring abuse without complaint or self-defense, cannot understand her sister’s more assertive reaction to censure. Later Austen writes concerning Fanny’s reaction to Susan, “the determined character of her general manners had astonished and alarmed her, and it was at least a fortnight before she began to understand a disposition so totally different from her own” (343). In this particular passage, Austen contrasts Susan’s character traits with Fanny’s without judging them to be inferior. While Susan’s “fearless,” “determined” nature makes Fanny uncomfortable, these qualities in themselves are not portrayed as character defects in Susan. It seems, then, that some of the difficulties Fanny faces in building a
relationship with Susan are simply due to personality differences that Fanny will eventually come to accept.

Other difficulties in forming this relationship are caused by Fanny's disapproval of some of Susan's specific behaviors. While these behaviors are influenced by Susan's assertive personality, they do not necessarily define her character. When Fanny first reencounters Susan, she notices that Susan shows "no advantage of manner in receiving her" (327). Fanny's perception of Susan's lack of refinement is not a major detriment to Fanny's anticipation of forming a relationship with Susan. Austen writes of Fanny's reaction to her sisters, "Would they but love her, she would be satisfied" (327). However, some of Susan's actions make Fanny mistakenly question Susan's ability and willingness to form loving relationships. Being unaccustomed to the way in which the Price family functions, Fanny initially misreads some of Susan's responses to other family members. For instance, Fanny is taken aback when Susan squabbles with their five-year-old sister, Betsey, over a silver knife their sister, Mary, had left to Susan on her deathbed. Since the knife is a treasured keepsake to Susan, she is concerned that Betsey "would spoil it, and get it for her own" (335). Describing this scene that Fanny witnesses, Austen writes, "Up jumped
Susan, claiming [the knife] as her own, and trying to get it away" (335). When Susan is unable to physically remove the knife from Betsey's possession, she reprimands Betsey "very warmly" (335). Fanny watches this display and is "quite shocked" (335). This is the first interaction between Susan and her younger siblings to leave Fanny with a negative impression.

While Fanny believes Susan is right to try to correct the behavior of their younger siblings, she disapproves of Susan's manner of doing so. Fanny generally finds Susan's corrections of their younger siblings, "though very reasonable in themselves," to be "given . . . with ill-timed and powerless warmth" (339). From this assessment Fanny concludes not only that Susan is ineffective in guiding their younger siblings, but also that she must not have a very affectionate nature. Fanny's observances of Susan's typical interactions not only with their siblings, but also with their mother, leave Fanny skeptical of her ability to form a supportive relationship with Susan. Austen explains, "Of Susan's temper, [Fanny] had many doubts. Her continual disagreements with her mother, her rash squabbles with Tom and Charles [her brothers], and petulance with Betsey were at least so distressing to Fanny that though admitting they were by no means without
provocation, she feared the disposition that could push them to such length must be far from amiable, and from affording any repose to herself” (340). Rather than simply displaying personality differences, these passages show specific examples of actions that Fanny deems inappropriate. These actions create Fanny’s mistaken impression that Susan is disagreeable, and Fanny’s initial reaction is to keep herself emotionally distanced from Susan.

However, Fanny soon begins to recognize that she has misjudged Susan. As Fanny spends more time with her, she comes to appreciate Susan’s positive qualities. Fanny sees that although Susan’s boldness at first made her uncomfortable, this quality in Susan has value. Fanny realizes, “Susan tried to be useful, where she could only have gone away and cried; and that Susan was useful she could perceive” (343). Fanny further recognizes that Susan possesses the quality of good judgment. Austen explains, “Fanny soon became disposed to admire the natural light of the mind which could so early distinguish justly” (343). Fanny appreciates more fully that while Susan’s responses to the behavior of other family members are sometimes a bit harsh, the feelings motivating these responses are entirely reasonable. Fanny realizes, “In every argument with her
mother, Susan had in point of reason the advantage” (343). Fanny also acknowledges that Susan’s desire to correct the behavior of their younger siblings is appropriate even when her methods of correction are not. Fanny thus comes to shift her focus from judging Susan’s negative characteristics to valuing her positive traits.

Fanny also begins to understand the underlying causes behind Susan’s negative behavior and to empathize with Susan’s difficult situation. As Fanny comes to know Susan better, she begins to recognize Susan’s need for guidance and affection, needs with which Fanny can identify. While Susan has not been physically separated from their biological parents, she has experienced parental neglect. Mr. Price’s attempts at parenting seem to be solely comprised of occasionally yelling threats to his sons when they get too unruly. Austen also portrays Mrs. Price as an ineffective and somewhat indifferent parent. Austen clearly shows that Mrs. Price fails to provide intellectual instruction or appropriate correction for her children. Describing Fanny’s observations of her family, Austen writes, “she must and did feel that her mother was a partial, ill-judging parent . . . who neither taught nor restrained her children” (339). Thus, it seems Susan has lacked any appropriate guidance herself, and, seeing her
siblings’ need of correction, she has tried to step in to fulfill that role. Fanny recognizes this motivation and realizes the difficulty an unaided fourteen-year-old girl would have in trying to establish some sort of order in such an unruly household. Fanny becomes amazed, in fact, “that, brought up in the midst of negligence and error, [Susan] should have formed such proper opinions of what ought to be—she who had had no cousin Edmund to direct her thoughts or fix her principles” (345). Thus, as Fanny begins to understand how difficult it is for Susan to make appropriate choices without ever having had appropriate guidance, she blames Susan less for her faults and respects Susan more for her strengths.

Austen further shows that Susan, like Fanny, has been deprived of a sense of love and belonging in her own home. In fact, Mrs. Price tends to blame Susan for problems within their home and to be more lenient with her other children. For instance, when the fire is low when Fanny first arrives, Mrs. Price scolds, “Susan, you should have taken care of the fire” (329). During Susan and Betsey’s scuffle over the silver knife, Mrs. Price again places the blame entirely upon Susan. Mrs. Price reprimands Susan for being “so quarrelsome” (335). Interestingly, although the knife was left to Susan,
Mrs. Price “kept it from her,” but keeps it within Betsey’s reach. When Betsey inevitably finds it, Mrs. Price does not reprimand her for playing with a forbidden item. Instead, even in seemingly correcting Betsey, she again places all of the blame upon Susan, saying, “You should not have taken it out, my dear, . . . because Susan is so cross about it” (335). Fanny sees that while Mrs. Price has some very limited concern for Susan’s well being, Susan, like Fanny, is excluded from receiving much affection from their mother. Austen writes concerning Mrs. Price, “Her daughters had never been much to her” (338). While Mrs. Price is overly lenient toward her youngest daughter, Betsy, and toward her sons, Austen makes it clear that Susan has never experienced any sort of favoritism herself. Austen writes, “The blind fondness which was forever producing evil around her, she had never known. There was no gratitude for affection past or present, to make her bear with its excesses to the others” (343). After a few weeks of observing Susan’s need of both guidance and affection, Fanny is better able to understand Susan’s sometimes harsh responses to other family members. Fanny, who can identify with a lack of maternal guidance, and who can certainly identify with a lack of affection, is able to
utilize her empathy to form a supportive mentoring relationship that will help to fulfill these needs for Susan.

This mentoring relationship is initiated by Fanny’s demonstration of affection for Susan. Fanny accomplishes this through purchasing a silver knife for Betsey. When Betsey receives her own new silver knife, she has no more interest in playing with the knife Mary had left to Susan. Susan recognizes this gift as a favor on her behalf, and Austen tells us that Fanny’s intervention “was a means of opening Susan’s heart to her” (344). Once a kind action has opened the door to this relationship, Fanny is able to effectively guide Susan in both intellectual and moral development. Fanny guides Susan’s intellectual development by selecting books for Susan to read and discussing the readings with her. Since the Price household does not own any books, Fanny subscribes to a lending library and provides Susan with reading material through this venue. Up until Fanny’s involvement with Susan, Susan had had very little education. Fanny, who has developed a love of learning herself, wants to share this valuable resource with her sister. Austen writes, “Susan had read nothing, and Fanny longed to give her a share in her own first pleasures” (346). Although Susan does not have an innate love of reading, she recognizes the importance of education and
appreciates Fanny's efforts to instruct her. Austen explains, "Susan was growing very fond of her, and though without any of the early delight in books, which had been so strong in Fanny, with a disposition much less inclined . . . to information for information's sake, she had so strong a desire of not appearing ignorant, as with a good clear understanding, made her a most attentive, profitable, thankful pupil" (362). Austen's note that these educational efforts are successful as "Susan was growing very fond" of Fanny, emphasizes the importance of this mentoring relationship in meeting both Susan's emotional and educational needs. Susan is receptive to Fanny's instructional efforts not only because she understands her need for education, but also because Fanny has demonstrated affection for Susan and concern for her well-being.

Fanny also instructs Susan in her moral development by providing behavioral guidance. As indicated earlier, Susan has a tendency to lose her temper when dealing with other family members. As Susan and Fanny develop a relationship, Fanny tries to gently guide Susan to be more patient with others. Austen writes, "She gave advice; advice too sound to be resisted by a good understanding, and given so mildly and considerately as not to irritate an imperfect temper; and she
had the happiness of observing its good effects not infrequently" (345). The fact that this advice is offered "considerately" shows Fanny guiding Susan in a way that is supportive rather than judgmental. Although Fanny deems some of Susan's behaviors as inappropriate, her attitude toward Susan demonstrates genuine affection and concern rather than condemnation for Susan's faults. While Austen does not provide the specific content of the advice Fanny gives to Susan, the context seems to imply that it concerns being more considerate of the feelings of others, even when she may rightly disagree with their actions. Austen states that in giving advice, Fanny tries to instill in Susan "the juster notions of what was due to every body, and what would be wisest for herself" (344). Thus, Fanny seems to be trying to teach Susan to behave in a way that respects others while still considering her own well-being and respecting herself.

It is important to note also that Fanny does not eradicate Susan's personality or try to create a second Fanny through her guidance of Susan. As discussed earlier, Fanny has come to appreciate and even admire the differences in Susan's personality, and at the end of novel, Austen makes it clear that Susan has retained her independent nature. Although Susan comes to take Fanny's position as companion to
Lady Bertram, Austen also demonstrates that Susan will be much happier at Mansfield Park than Fanny's was. While Kathleen Fowler sees Susan's "transplantation" to Mansfield as disturbing in that it removes her from her natural environment, Austen indicates that Susan is more than happy about the arrangements. When Susan first leaves for Mansfield, Austen describes her as experiencing "ecstasy" (384). Besides Susan's willingness to go to Mansfield, the changes that take place between Fanny's first arrival at Mansfield and Susan's residence there serve to significantly improve Susan's situation. First, Mrs. Norris's absence provides an invaluable benefit. Secondly, Sir Thomas's examination of his faults as a parent lead him to recognize the negative effects of "his . . . severity" and hopefully to amend his attitudes toward his family. Finally, Susan's assertive personality makes her better suited for life at Mansfield Park. Austen states, "Her fearless disposition and happier nerves made every thing easy to her there" (408). Austen demonstrates, therefore, that Fanny's lessons to Susan do not, and are not intended to, teach Susan to abandon her assertiveness or to become a second Fanny. Instead, Fanny's guidance allows Susan to maintain her independent nature while
gaining a sense of love and belonging and an intellectual and moral education.

While this relationship certainly holds many benefits for Susan in providing her with previously unknown affection and guidance, it also benefits Fanny since the relationship is one of mutual affection and support. Fanny, who has difficulty adjusting to the noisy, disorderly Price home and has even more difficulty overcoming her disappointment with the lack of affection demonstrated by her family, eventually finds some solace from these troubles as her relationship with Susan develops. Austen writes, "The first solid consolation which Fanny received for the evils of home . . . was in a better knowledge of Susan, and a hope of being of service to her" (343). Austen further reveals the benefits of this relationship for Fanny when Fanny receives the news of Tom Bertram’s illness. Austen writes, "Susan was her only companion and listener on this, as on more common occasions. Susan was always ready to hear and to sympathize" (370). Through such clear demonstrations of affection and wholehearted support, Susan becomes the first female character with whom Fanny can build a truly positive relationship, one that is mutually beneficial. Further, Fanny seems to gain greater self esteem through her office as mentor to Susan. Austen
notes that for Fanny, at the beginning of her relationship with Susan, it was “new ... to imagine herself capable of guiding or informing any one” (344). Her performance of this role demonstrates some personal growth for Fanny in that she has become confident enough in her own judgment not only to rely upon it in making decisions for herself, but also to employ it to guide others.

Interestingly, Henry Crawford, who is the suitor Sir Thomas encourages Fanny to marry, tries to separate Fanny from Susan and tries to undermine the one positive female relationship Fanny has developed. Although his attempts at division are subtle, and they may seem fairly innocuous, they still demonstrate his desire to promote his relationship with Fanny at the expense of her relationship with Susan. When Henry comes to visit Fanny at Portsmouth, he joins the Price family on a walk to the dock-yard. Austen notes that as he talks to Fanny, “he could have wished her sister away” (350). While his wish for Susan’s absence is motivated by a not unreasonable desire to talk with Fanny alone, it demonstrates the first of several instances in which Henry wishes to separate Fanny and Susan. On another occasion when he joins the Price family for a walk, he literally separates the two sisters by stepping in between them. Austen writes, “before
they had been there long—somehow or other—there was no saying how—Fanny could not have believed it—but he was walking in between them with an arm of each under his, and she did not know how to prevent or put an end to it” (354). Obviously Fanny’s discomfort is caused by the fact that Henry’s advances are unwanted, but this passage again demonstrates a correlation between these unwelcome advances and the separation of the two sisters. Shortly afterward, he suggests that Fanny cut her visit at Portsmouth short and return to Mansfield. Then he tells Susan that this suggestion is purely out of concern for Fanny’s health. He explains, “When you know her as well as I do, I am sure you will agree that . . . she ought never to be long banished from the free air, and liberty of the country” (356). While his assessment of Fanny’s health is fairly accurate, his word choice is a bit presumptuous in asserting a superior knowledge of Fanny. Although Susan has only spent six weeks with Fanny since her return from Mansfield, she has served as Fanny’s only real companion during her stay at Portsmouth. Fanny has shared her thoughts and beliefs with Susan as she has guided Susan’s intellectual and moral development. Conversely, Fanny has made every attempt to avoid talking to Henry at all when politeness did not require her to speak with him. For his
part, Henry took virtually no notice of Fanny until he decided to "make Fanny Price in love with [him]" (197). Incidentally, the time from which he decided to pursue Fanny until he proposed to her consisted of six weeks. Although perhaps not consciously crafted for this effect, his assertion that he knows Fanny better than Susan seems to minimize Susan's relationship with Fanny in order to elevate the importance of his own relationship with her.

Contrastingly, Edmund, who is Fanny's own choice for a marriage partner, makes no attempts to separate Susan and Fanny or to undermine their relationship. In fact, it is Edmund's letter that communicates Susan's invitation to join Fanny when she returns to Mansfield Park. As Edmund accompanies Fanny and Susan back to Mansfield, Austen mentions that Susan's presence prevents Edmund from talking openly with Fanny about his distress over Henry and Maria's affair. (385). However, he never wishes Susan away or makes any attempt to separate her from Fanny. Finally, Austen demonstrates the coincidence between Fanny's relationship with Edmund and her relationship with Susan through the fact that Edmund and Fanny's marriage solidifies Susan's position at Mansfield Park, a situation that ensures the proximity of the two sisters. These portrayals of Henry and Edmund exemplify a
relationship between Fanny's assertion of independence from patriarchy and her supportive relationship with Susan. Henry, the suitor whom patriarchal figures try to compel Fanny to accept, promotes his relationship with Fanny at the expense of Fanny's relationship with Susan. In this way patriarchy tries to suppress her supportive relationship with another female character. Contrastingly, Edmund's relationship with Fanny, as a relationship that Fanny chooses of her own free will, leaves space for Fanny to maintain a positive, supportive relationship with her sister.

Obviously, difficulties exist in describing Fanny Price as a feminist heroine. Her typical lack of assertiveness and her tendency to accept undeserved blame, conditions exacerbated, if not entirely caused, by the abuse she endures, tend to undermine such classifications of her character. The fact that her greatest step toward autonomy, her refusal to be persuaded to marry Henry Crawford, is taken so gently and quietly and that she is largely unsuccessful in her efforts to be heard on the matter seem to further compromise her position as a feminist heroine. However, the very fact that she tries to make herself heard, that she listens to herself when no one else will and persists in her relying upon her own judgment certainly qualifies her as feminist heroine who challenges
male authority. Further, while her own childhood and adolescence was marked by a lack of female support and her own attempts at assertiveness are compromised, Fanny demonstrates both a willingness and an aptitude for offering support to her sister Susan through her role as Susan’s mentor. In providing Susan with love and acceptance and intellectual and moral guidance while allowing Susan to retain her independent nature, Fanny’s character is largely successful in meeting this second qualification of a feminist heroine, the ability to build supportive relationships with other women.
While Jane Austen's Fanny Price is often seen as an unlikely candidate for a feminist heroine, readers often celebrate Charlotte Brontë's Jane Eyre as a strong feminist, perhaps even the strongest feminist character in nineteenth century fiction. Both characters are introverted, plain girls who occupy marginal positions within the families in which they live. Both are subject to forms of physical and emotional abuse within these families. However, while Fanny responds to this abuse primarily by becoming even more submissive and self-denying, Jane responds to her more severe abuse by becoming outspoken and at times defiant. While Fanny is a ward, separated from her parents by her aunt and uncle's offer of patronage, Jane is an orphan whose Aunt Reed only keeps her because of a promise made to her uncle on his deathbed. Fanny lives with a well-intentioned, though often emotionally cold and distant, patriarch but is removed from some of her obligations to him because of her marginal status within his home. Conversely, Jane, as an orphan girl raised by her aunt, has no patriarch to whom she belongs or to whom she owes gratitude and duty. These differences would seem to allow Jane more opportunities to subvert patriarchal values. In addition, Jane's wider range of experiences, her years as a
student at a charity school for girls, her experience as a governess, and her move to Marsh End, would seem to allow her more opportunities to form friendships with other women as these experiences widen the circle of her female acquaintances.

It seems, then, that Charlotte Brontë may have positioned Jane Eyre in situations that could well display both qualities of a feminist heroine. Is Jane Eyre, in fact a successful feminist heroine? An answer to this question necessitates an examination of Jane’s role in patriarchy at large as well as her reactions to the various patriarchal models she encounters. It also requires a review of her relationships with other female characters, not only those women from whom she receives mentorship and support, but also, and perhaps more importantly, the one female character for whom Jane is given the responsibility of female mentorship: Adèle.

In some ways Jane’s situation as an orphan girl reflects a magnified version of the situation of all women in Victorian society in that all women experienced disempowerment. Gilbert and Gubar reflect this thought in discussing Jane’s flight from Thornfield: “Her terrible journey across the moors suggests the essential homelessness—the nameless, placeless,
and contingent status—of women in a patriarchal society" (364). A woman in Victorian England typically had little or no economic position, social status, or legal rights of her own. Instead she received her economic and social status based on the position of her father or husband. Drew Lamonica points out that in Victorian literature as well as Victorian society, “Membership in a family entitled children to certain ‘services’ that did much to secure their social status as adults, including rights to primogeniture, inheritances, dowries, and arranged marriages.” She further states that a woman’s prospects for marriage were closely tied to the social and economic position of her father, “who provided for her dowry or settlement” (71). Because of this situation of complete dependence, the same father or husband who served as a woman’s protector and provider also could serve as her oppressor. The father/daughter and husband/wife relationships were not typically ones of equality; the relationship had to come on the father or husband’s terms, whatever those were. Thomas E. Jordan notes, “Within the [Victorian] household it was an accepted value that the father was in charge and that the children obeyed” (66). Wives were similarly expected to observe their husband’s authority. Illustrating the mindset behind this cultural value, Perkin
writes, "Aware, if only dimly, that a woman lived completely under her husband's protection or cover, traditionalists justified this on several grounds...someone had to rule the household, otherwise disputes would be endless, and it was better for the husband to be the ruler, since he was stronger, wiser, and knew more of the world" (29-30).

This is not to suggest that most Victorian fathers or husbands were tyrannical or abusive, although legally they had a right to be. Often, in fact, patriarchal society viewed this dependence as being advantageous to women. Perkin describes this mindset when she writes, "Being physically and economically the weaker sex, their dependence, the theory went, was for their own good" (1). However, a Victorian husband or father in the very act of "protecting" a woman, often robbed her of her agency. He made decisions for her because he thought he knew what was best and secluded her from knowledge of the world in order to "protect" her innocence. Jane's lack of such a patriarchal protector and provider forces her to provide for and protect herself.

In the beginning of the novel, Jane is completely without a patriarchal protector. While Brontë portrays Mr. Reed as a guardian who would be sympathetic and benevolent to Jane, his death leaves her to defend herself against the verbal abuse of
Mrs. Reed, her children, and even the servants. Jane is also forced to defend herself against the physical abuse of John Reed. The Reed family makes it painfully clear that Jane is not a member of the family and has no rights to their protection or love. John G. Peters points out, “Early in the novel, characters describe Jane almost exclusively with derogatory labels. And by so doing, they marginalize Jane. When the Reeds call her an ‘imp’ or a ‘rat,’ they both punish her by insult and psychologically isolate her from their family” (59). Lamonica, discussing Jane’s position in the Reed household, notes, “Jane’s place at Gateshead is ultimately anomalous: she is less than a servant, family and yet not family, an unnatural child, a ‘kept’ orphan, a heterogeneous thing” (72). Being thus cast out and left without patriarchal protection, it is clear from the beginning that Jane will have to protect and provide for herself; she must develop a sense of independence and assertiveness.

As many critics have noted, Jane comes to display these traits even within the Reed household. Kate Flint observes that “Throughout the novel, Jane [is] characterized by activity, rather than by a tendency to become passively absorbed in the lives of others” (181). Rosemary Babcock similarly notes Jane’s early assertiveness as well as her
unwillingness to become subservient in order to gain affection; Babcock comments, "Rather than succumb to the emotional and physical rebuffs made to her by the Reed household and integrate into the family system on their terms, Jane experiences what little independence is open to her to deal with their rejection" (50). Lamonica points out that Jane, in fact, eventually rejects the Reed family. She states, "the Reeds are not a family she would want to join anyway. And the child eventually learns this herself, maintaining her difference and distance from them" (70). In fact, Jane also rejects the one early gesture of patriarchal protection she experiences when she believes the ghost of her uncle Reed is arising to defend her. Jane explains, "This idea, consolatory in theory, I felt would be terrible if realized" (16). Of course, it seems reasonable for Jane to be afraid of a ghostly protector; however, later in the novel, she actually welcomes the ghostly maternal presence that comes to her in a "trance-like dream" (325). This maternal figure, unlike Mr. Reed's apparition, is apparently comforting in both theory and realization.

Jane encounters her next major patriarchal figure in the person of Mr. Brocklehurst. While he assumes the role of patriarchal oppressor to the girls of Lowood school, demanding
strict, unquestioning obedience to his unreasonable demands, he actively resists the task of adequately providing for the girls in his charge. Rather than protecting these girls, he causes physical harm to them by depriving them of adequate food and shelter. While Mr. Brocklehurst indulges his own daughter, he starves the pupils at Lowood and berates them at every opportunity. As Rich notes, "He is the embodiment of class and sexual double-standards and of the hypocrisy of the powerful, using religion, charity, and morality to keep the poor in their place and to repress and humiliate the young women over whom he is set in charge" (94). At the same time, he expects these girls to respect his authority and adopt his values. Feeling no sense of duty to him as either a protector or provider, Jane refuses to meet these expectations. While Jane has to endure Mr. Brocklehurst’s oppression and maintain a display of adherence to his commands, she still maintains a sense of independence by refusing to accept his way of thinking. Flint notes that Jane’s “actions and attitudes in childhood indicate her desire to arrive at judgments on her own terms; she refuses to accept Mrs. Reed and Mr. Brocklehurst’s would-be definitive interpretations of scripture and the moral law” (182). Jane thus displays
independence from patriarchy at Lowood by rejecting the values of the oppressive patriarchal figure.

Having grown up without any true patriarchal protection, the adult Jane feels no duty to be subservient to patriarchy. She, therefore, continues to display her independent spirit throughout her interactions with Rochester. Rochester is himself a patriarch who has learned to despise the creations of patriarchy. He scorns the vanity and superficiality Blanche Ingram and Celine Varens display in trying to exhibit feminine charms and beauty in order to attract male notice and win male financial provision. Rochester seems to loathe both himself and Bertha for the unhappy marriage that was arranged by his own father. He also clearly despises fallen women in the figures of Celine and his other mistresses, Giacinta and Clara, and most notably in the figure of Bertha. When Rochester lists his grievances against Bertha, one of his most notable complaints is his discovery that Bertha is "unchaste" (311).

Yet, even as he despises these creations of patriarchy and denies his own role as a patriarch, he himself repeats patterns of patriarchal oppression. He denies his role as Bertha’s husband, disowning her as his wife and repeatedly saying to Jane, "I am not married" (309), but he oppresses
Bertha through his imprisonment of her, ostensibly providing for her by hiring Grace Poole as her caretaker and guard. He denies his role as Adèle's father, asking Jane, "What do I want with a child for a companion? and not my own child—a French dancer's bastard" (306). Yet while he provides for Adèle's physical needs, he oppresses her by openly criticizing her. While he admires Jane's independence, he tries to oppress her as well. He attempts to form her into yet another superficial, submissive female by trying to adorn her with jewels after their engagement and later by trying to force Jane to comply with his demand that she live with him as his unlawful wife. When Jane refuses to become his mistress, he exclaims, "Jane! will you hear reason?" He then threatens her, "because if you won't I'll try violence" (307). Further, in the very act of trying to trick Jane into a false marriage and later in trying to convince her to live as his mistress, he threatens to make Jane into a fallen woman.

Yet, Jane is resistant to Rochester's attempts to dominate her, and she maintains a clear sense of independence throughout her interactions with him. Rosemary Babcock notes, "Although Jane acknowledges Rochester's higher status as her employer, she remains unintimidated by his attempts to control her" (59). Even in their early interactions, Jane displays
assertiveness and at times blunt honesty. Babcock writes, “To Rochester’s surprise, Jane is indeed well-versed in the art of verbal sparring” (60). With every attempt Rochester makes to intimidate her, she “develops responses that allow her to maintain command throughout the transaction (Babcock 60). Further, she makes no pretenses to try to please him with flattery. When he asks her, “Do you think me handsome?” she quickly replies, “No, sir” (133). As their relationship develops into friendship and then romance, she continues to maintain this sense of assertiveness throughout their interactions. When Rochester buys her jewels after their engagement, Jane comments, “the more he bought me, the more my cheek burned with a sense of annoyance and degradation” (272). She explains to Rochester:

Do you remember what you said of Céline Varens?—of the diamonds, the cashmeres you gave her? I will not be your English Céline Varens. I shall continue to act as Adèle’s governess; by that I shall earn my board and lodging, and thirty pounds a year besides. I’ll furnish my own wardrobe out of that money, and you shall give me nothing but . . . your regard.

(274)
When Rochester eventually attempts to persuade and even threaten Jane into living with him as his mistress, she maintains her self-reliance and resists both his persuasions and threats. When Rochester asks her, "Who in the world cares for you? Or who will be injured by what you do?" she answers, "I care for myself. The more solitary, the more friendless, the more unsustained I am, the more I will respect myself" (322).

Some critics have argued, however, that Jane's refusal to become Rochester's mistress reinforces patriarchal values in that she adheres to conventional moral standards maintained by a patriarchal society. For instance, Bernard Paris claims, "the critics who see her as a feminist heroine" have "misread Jane" (156). He argues, "She longs for greater freedom and a wider range of activity, but she is afraid to pursue those desires" (156). He claims that because Jane is afraid to dismiss the rules of conventional morality (156) and because she has a need "to live up to her idealized image of herself," (151) "she satisfies her desire for knowledge of real life amidst its perils by living vicariously through Rochester" (152). In response to the most notable feminist passage in the novel, in which Jane describes the ways in which "women feel just as men feel" (JE 111), Paris comments, "This passage
is justly celebrated for its feminist sentiments, but we must remember that Jane could never engage in a real revolt against the constraints of her lot because of her need to protect her respectability" (152). Although Paris is correct in noting Jane’s concern with propriety and respectability, he seems to ignore the real consequences of a “real revolt” against society. If Jane had flouted the rules of conventional morality, she would have lost any hope of providing for herself through employment as a governess and placed herself in a situation of complete economic dependence on Mr. Rochester without any legal claims to his provision. Jordan notes, “In the case of both nannies and governesses, a good character was considered indispensable” (68). Since there were so few employment opportunities for women, disregarding the moral standards of the time would have placed Jane in a position where she would have difficulty providing for herself, and her concern with morality in her relationship with Rochester should certainly not discount her contribution as a feminist character. As Rich notes, “She will not live with Rochester as his dependent mistress because she knows that relationship would be destructive to her” (106). Thus, her relationship with Rochester does, in fact, display her ability to stand up for herself.
Although St. John is widely different from Rochester, he similarly attempts to bully Jane into making a decision against her better judgment. When he becomes convinced that Jane would make the perfect partner in his missionary venture to India, he will not accept Jane's refusal. He tells her, "A missionary's wife you must---shall be. You shall be mine: I claim you" (409). When she resolves to go with him if she may go as his "adopted sister" rather than his wife (412), he tries to dictate God's will to her, representing his own will as God's. He asks her, "Do you think God will be satisfied with half an obligation?. ..I cannot accept on his behalf a divided allegiance: it must be entire" (413). While Jane has difficulty resisting St. John's persuasions, she does continue to refuse him. Although Jane seems to be on the verge of complying with St. John's demands when she hears the supernatural call of Mr. Rochester, she does at last successfully escape his persuasions. At this point she regains any assertiveness she may have lost in previous interactions with St. John. She narrates, "It was my time to assume ascendancy. My powers were in play, and in force. I told him to forbear question or remark; I desired him to leave me: I must, and would be alone. He obeyed at once. Where there is energy to command well enough, obedience never fails"
In this passage Jane certainly displays a strong sense of assertiveness in her dealings with St. John.

Through all of these situations Jane maintains an assertive, independent nature. She provides for herself economically through teaching and maintains an attitude of self-reliance and an adherence to personal standards in spite of the attempts male characters make to dictate her actions and beliefs. As many critics have noted, it is admittedly difficult to view Jane's eventual marriage to Rochester as wholly positive. It is troubling that before Rochester can be brought into an equal marital relationship with Jane, his first wife must die a gruesome death, he must suffer significant financial loss through the burning of Thornfield, and he must be physically disabled by the loss of his vision and the amputation of one of his hands. Also disturbing is Brontë's implication that Rochester's physical disability somehow renders him innocuous. Nevertheless, the fact that Jane enters her marriage of her own choosing and that Brontë portrays the marriage at last as a relationship of remarkable equality, at least by Victorian standards, certainly reinforces Jane's position as an independent heroine. In this first qualification of a feminist heroine, that she achieves a
sense of independence for herself, Brontë’s heroine does very well for her time.

Jane also seems to have some level of success in developing positive relationships with other female characters. Adrienne Rich, in fact, praises the novel’s portrayal of positive relationships between women; she writes, “In Jane Eyre . . . we find an alternative to the stereotypical rivalry of women; we see women in real and supportive relationships to each other, not simply as points on a triangle or as temporary substitutes for men” (106). As Rich suggests, these relationships offer Jane the affection, support, and positive modeling she needs to help her become a strong, independent woman who can resist the oppression of a patriarchal society. In “Jane Eyre: The Temptations of a Motherless Woman,” Rich explains, “Jane Eyre, motherless and economically powerless, undergoes certain traditional female temptations, and finds that each temptation presents itself along with an alternative—the image of a nurturing or principled or spirited woman on whom she can model herself, or to whom she can look for support” (91). Rich points out that Bessie is Jane’s first nurturer and suggests that Bessie’s encouragement helps Jane resist the “temptation of victimization” in the Reed household (93). While Bessie is
originally complicit in the Reeds' abuse of Jane, when Bessie's attitude toward her turns to compassion, Jane welcomes her support.

Rich notes that Jane's next nurturers, Miss Temple and Helen Burns, serve as Jane's first true female role models. She writes of Miss Temple, "She is maternal in a special sense: not simply sheltering and protective, but encouraging of intellectual growth" (94). Rich suggests that both Miss Temple and Helen help "give the young Jane a sense of her own worth and of ethical choice" (95). The support and positive modeling Rich notes here help enable Jane to resist Mr. Brocklehurst's way of thinking. When Jane fears that everyone at Lowood will hate her because Mr. Brocklehurst had publicly accused her of being a deceitful child, it is Helen who reassures her, "Mr. Brocklehurst is not a god: nor even a great and admired man: he is little liked here" (69). Shortly afterward, Miss Temple brings Jane and Helen to her room to talk with them. Miss Temple gently asks Jane to explain her side, and after listening to her, Miss Temple places more value upon Jane's words than Mr. Brocklehurst's. Jane reacts with open admiration and affection in response to the worthy qualities and compassion she sees in Helen and Miss Temple.
Jane experiences similar supportive relationships with women when she meets Mary and Diana Rivers. Rich notes of these women, "They live as intellectual equals with their brother; yet with Jane, in her illness and convalescence, they are maternally tender and sensitive" (103). Rich explains that "for the first time since the death of Helen Burns she has an intellectually sympathetic companionship with young women her own age" (103). Like her relationships with Miss Temple and Helen, her relationship with the Rivers sisters, and most notably with Diana seems to offer her some support from patriarchal pressure. When Diana learns that St. John is trying to convince Jane to marry him and move to India, she agrees with Jane's decision to refuse him. As Rich suggests, Jane certainly maintains several positive relationships with other women and gains strength through them.

However, not all relationships between women in the novel are so positive. In fact, Elaine Showalter asserts that in *Jane Eyre* the feminine heroine grows up in a world without female solidarity, where women in fact police each other on behalf of patriarchal tyranny. There is sporadic sisterhood and kindness between the women in this world, and Jane finds it ultimately at Marsh
End with Diana and Mary Rivers; but on the whole these women are helpless to aid each other, even if they want to. (117)

As evidence of this, Showalter cites Miss Abbot and Bessie tying Jane up in the red-room on Mrs. Reeds’s orders to punish her for fighting back against John Reed’s abuse. Showalter also cites the example of Grace Poole guarding Bertha for Mr. Rochester. Showalter even suggests that Miss Temple’s relationship with her students provides another example of a woman acting “on behalf of patriarchal tyranny.” Showalter argues that “the kindly Miss Temple starves the girls” on Mr. Brocklehurst’s orders. While Showalter is perhaps overly pessimistic about the lack of positive female relationships and perhaps also a bit too hard on Miss Temple, obviously the novel does contain examples of negative relationships between women, some of which involve Jane. Besides Showalter’s examples, Jane’s every interaction with Mrs. Reed demonstrates an abusive relationship. Georgiana and Eliza Reed treat Jane as an inferior as does Blanche Ingram. However, in most cases when other female characters provide Jane with an opportunity to develop a supportive relationship, she does form strong positive bonds. In all of these positive relationships, with Bessie, Miss Temple, Helen, Mary, and Diana, Jane is either in
a position of being mentored and nurtured or providing mutual
support in a peer relationship. In the one relationship in
which Brontë provides some detail of Jane’s role as mentor,
Jane’s relationship with Adèle, Jane has some difficulty in
providing affection and support to a younger female. One of
the primary reasons for Jane’s difficulty in her relationship
with Adèle seems to lie in the differences between Jane and
Adèle.

Although like Jane Adèle is parentless, her early
position in the patriarchy is different than Jane’s. Unlike
Jane, Adèle has a living father; he just refuses to claim her
as his child. While Adèle receives material benefits, she is
still a disempowered figure. While Rochester’s treatment of
Adèle is less cruel than the Reeds’ treatment of Jane, Adèle
still does not receive the social standing, sense of
belonging, or parental regard that a legitimate child would
expect. However, she is still under the control of the
patriarchal figure, Mr. Rochester. Although he claims her
only as his “ward,” he maintains a patriarchal power over her;
she is still expected to obey his commands. Since he gives
her material benefits, he also has a claim to her duty and
respect. Adèle, then, experiences much of the disempowerment
of patriarchy with little of the privilege.
Being put in this situation, it is not surprising that Adèle’s character is very different than Jane’s. While Jane is self-reliant, assertive, and at times bluntly honest, Adèle is dependent and eager to please. Although Jane longs for a sense of belonging and affection, her self-reliance makes her unwilling to pay any price in order to achieve acceptance. Contrastingly, Adèle attaches herself to others desperately and openly displays affection in hopes of receiving some small token of reciprocation. In light of these differences, Jane would obviously not view Adèle as someone wholly like herself. However, one would expect Jane to identify and sympathize with Adèle to a larger extent than she does because Adèle comes from a similar situation of disempowerment.

One might expect Jane to identify and sympathize with Adèle because she is an orphan without anyone who displays any true affection for her. Although Adèle has been "spoilt and indulged" in terms of material goods, she clearly lacks acceptance and love. However, in spite of Adèle’s clear need for love and belonging and her willingness to display affection toward Jane, Jane prevents herself from identifying with Adèle or feeling any deep affection for her. While Jane does not display antipathy toward Adèle, neither does she display the level of affection and acceptance one might
expect. Jane describes her original feelings for Adèle as comprising "conscientious solicitude" and "a quiet liking to her little self." Jane says of the child, "She had not great talents, no marked traits of character, no peculiar development of feeling or taste which raised her one inch above the ordinary level of childhood; but neither had she any deficiency or vice which sunk her below it" (110). Whereas Jane was described by others as being plain in appearance, Jane describes Adèle as being plain in character and accomplishments. Jane further tells her reader, "She [Adèle] made reasonable progress, entertained for me a vivacious, though perhaps not very profound affection; and by her simplicity, gay prattle, and efforts to please, inspired me, in return, with a degree of attachment sufficient to make us both content in each other's society" (110). This passage is telling, not only because it displays Jane's detached regard for Adèle, but also because it shows that even this response from Jane was only won through Adèle's "vivacious...affection" and "efforts to please" Jane. Clearly Adèle has had to work at receiving any degree of affection from Jane.

Jane dismisses this detached reaction to Adèle by saying it "will be thought cool language by persons who entertain solemn doctrines about the angelic nature of children" (110).
However, her response seems cool, not because Adèle seems to be "angelic" or because readers expect Jane to have an innate desire to love and nurture children, but because Adèle’s position as an orphan should inspire a more empathetic reaction from Jane. Jane scoffs at the idea of developing an "idolatrous devotion" for Adèle (110). Later, however, she has no problem developing an "idolatrous devotion" for Rochester. Further, Jane could display a far greater degree of affection for Adèle and still be quite a safe distance from displaying "idolatrous devotion" for her. Why then does Jane find it so hard to empathize with Adèle?

One explanation for Jane’s difficulty in identifying with Adèle lies in the fact that Adèle is continually portrayed as a superficial being. We have already seen how Jane notes Adèle’s lack of significant accomplishments and how she dismisses Adèle’s "vivacious . . . affection" for her as being "perhaps not very profound," or in other words superficial. Throughout the novel Jane’s narration continually portrays Adèle as a superficial child who is overly concerned with appearances, material goods, and receiving gifts. She tells Jane that she wanted to come to live with Mr. Rochester in England because "he was always kind to me and gave me pretty dresses and toys" (105). Noting Adèle’s apparent shallowness,
Gilbert and Gubar discuss Adèle’s role in the novel as being one of the “negative ‘role models’” Jane encounters (350). They explain, “[Adèle] longs for fashionable gowns rather than for love or freedom, and, the way her mother Céline did, sings and dances for her supper (350). Gilbert and Gubar question, “How is a poor, plain governess to contend with a society that rewards beauty and style? May not Adèle, the daughter of a ‘fallen woman’ be a model female in a world of prostitutes?” (350). Adèle’s values are certainly in need of revision; however, as Jane is Adèle’s governess and the adult in the relationship, it seems more reasonable that Jane should serve as a positive role model for Adèle, than Adèle should serve as a negative role model for Jane. Since Jane states, “she [Adèle] was committed entirely to my care,” it seems Jane is the only person, in fact, who provide Adèle with the guidance and support of a mentor. Further, Adèle’s focus on appearances and material belongings does not indicate that she does not “long for . . . love.” Considering the fact that material goods are the only semblance of love and acceptance Adèle receives, it should not be surprising to Jane or to readers that Adèle maintains a preoccupation with such things.

The shallowness of Jane’s regard for Adèle also seems to be caused by the impropriety that surrounded Adèle’s birth and
early life. Upon Jane’s first meeting with Adèle, Adèle reveals the fact that her mother was a dancer, and that Adèle used to perform with her. Adèle tells Jane, “A great many gentlemen and ladies came to see mama and I used to dance before them or sit on their knees and sing to them” (104). Adèle then proceeds to perform for Jane, singing her an operatic song about a woman who has been left by her lover. Jane comments, “The subject seemed strangely chosen for an infant singer; but I suppose the point of the exhibition lay in hearing the notes of love and jealousy warbled through the lisp of childhood; and in very bad taste that point was; at least I thought so” (104). Upon Adèle’s recitation of a poem, Jane further notes that Adèle displays “a flexibility of voice and an appropriateness of gesture, very unusual indeed at her age, and which proved she had been carefully trained” (104). Jane’s reactions to Adèle’s performances display not only Jane’s disapproval of the impropriety of Adèle’s early life with her mother, but also her disapproval of the artifice she believes Adèle displays by being so skilled in performance. Since Adèle fails to mention a father in this conversation and since her mother is, after all, a French opera girl, Jane probably suspects Adèle’s illegitimacy as well. Although Jane was despised as a child partially because of her parents’
poverty, a situation that Jane could not help any more than Adèle could help the situation she was born into, this first interview with Adèle clearly negatively colors Jane’s perception of her and contributes to Jane’s belief that Adèle is a superficial, somewhat improper child. This conversation should show Jane, however, how desperately Adèle needs affection, as she tells Jane, “Mr. Rochester asked me if I would like to go and live with him in England . . . but you see he has not kept his word, for he has brought me to England and now he has gone back again himself, and I never see him” (105). Clearly, Adèle is sorely lacking positive attention and genuine affection, a situation to which Jane should be able to relate.

Adèle’s need for affection is further, and painfully, displayed when Mr. Rochester makes his first appearance at Thornfield after Jane’s arrival. Adèle is completely preoccupied by a desire to see Mr. Rochester. Jane comments, “Adèle was not easy to teach that day, she could not apply: she kept running to the door and looking over the banister to see if she could get a glimpse of Mr. Rochester; then she coined pretexts to go downstairs, in order, as I shrewdly suspected, to visit [Mr. Rochester] in the library, where I knew she was not wanted” (120). Of course, Adèle is partially
motivated by a desire to receive the present Mr. Rochester had earlier promised her, but since presents are the only semblance of regard she ever receives from Mr. Rochester, this motivation should not discount her need for love and acceptance. Further, considering the value Adèle places on gifts, her regard for Jane is clear when she requests a present for Jane from Mr. Rochester before she has received her own gift (123). While Adèle seems desperate to receive attention and affection from Mr. Rochester, he clearly offers her neither. In praising Jane’s teaching skills, Rochester says of Adèle, “she is not bright, she has no talents; yet in a short time she has made much improvement” (123). Jane, apparently agreeing with his assessment of Adèle, receives the compliment without any rebuttal in spite of the fact that this statement is made in Adèle’s presence. Rochester’s lack of affection for Adèle is again made evident when Jane notices, “Adèle went to kiss him before quitting the room: he endured the caress, but scarcely seemed to relish it more than Pilot [Rochester’s dog] would have done, nor so much” (129). Yet none of this seems to inspire Jane with much compassion.

A turning point in Jane’s relationship with Adèle seems to come when Rochester tells Jane of his history with Adèle’s mother, Céline Varens, and confirms the fact that Adèle is
essentially parentless. Although Rochester accepts the responsibility of providing for Adèle financially, he never owns her as his child. He tells Jane, "unluckily the Varens . . . had given me this fillette Adèle; who she affirmed was my daughter; and perhaps she may be, though I see no proofs of such grim paternity written in her countenance: Pilot is more like me than she" (147). While Adèle had previously told Jane that her mother had died, Mr. Rochester claims, "Some years after I had broken with the mother, she abandoned her child and ran away to Italy with a musician or singer" (147). He then reemphasizes his own rejection of Adèle, saying, "I acknowledged no natural claim on Adèle's part to be supported by me; nor do I now acknowledge any, for I am not her father" (147). Although Rochester is unwilling to accept Adèle as his daughter, he seems to think that his act of accepting her as a ward is quite charitable. He tells Jane, "hearing that she was quite destitute, I e'en took the poor thing out of the mud and slime of Paris and transplanted it here, to grow up clean in the wholesome soil of an English country garden" (147). Even in describing his great kindness to Adèle, though, he is objectifying her, calling her "it" and comparing her to a plant. Earlier, Rochester has told Jane, "My Spring is gone, however; but it has left me that French floweret on my hands;
which, in some moods I would fain be rid of. Not valuing now
the root from whence it sprang; having found that it was of a
sort which nothing but gold dust could manure, I have but half
a liking to the blossom” (142). In comparing her to a flower,
he describes Adèle as simply an object to be looked upon, with
no will or feelings of its own. Peters points out that Adèle
is marginalized through this labeling in the same way Jane is
marginalized through labeling (61). In this passage too,
Rochester emphasizes his own charity in providing for Adèle,
saying, “I keep it and rear it rather on the Roman Catholic
principle of expatiating numerous sins, great or small, by one
good work” (142). Whereas Mrs. Reed raised Jane to avoid the
sin of breaking her promise to Mr. Reed, Rochester keeps Adèle
out of guilt for his past sins. In both cases, the wards are
despised for the obligation they inadvertently placed upon
their benefactors.

Somehow, these words from Rochester move Jane to
compassion for Adèle in a way that Adèle’s own words and
actions could not. When Rochester asks if she will be looking
for a new position now that she knows Adèle’s history, Jane
replies:

No, Adèle is not answerable for either her mother’s
faults or yours; I have a regard for her, and now
that I know that she is, in a sense, parentless—forsaken by her own mother and disowned by you sir—I shall cling to her closer than before. How could I possibly prefer the spoilt pet of a wealthy family, who would hate her governess as a nuisance, to a lonely little orphan, who leans on her as a friend? (147-148)

Interestingly, Jane seems to have previously, to some extent, blamed Adèle for “her mother’s faults” by allowing her knowledge of Adèle’s past to negatively color her perception of Adèle. One also notes that Jane knew of Adèle’s state of parentlessness prior to this conversation with Rochester. Adèle had told Jane that her mother had died and made no mention of a father in her recounting of her earlier life. However, the knowledge that Adèle has not lost her parents through their deaths, but that both her mother and father have rejected her, finally moves Jane toward a more compassionate attitude for Adèle. Jane has, of course, seen a great deal of evidence prior to this to indicate that Adèle lacked the acceptance and love of a parent or guardian, but Rochester’s pronouncement of this fact impacts Jane in a way that Adèle’s words and Jane’s own observations did not.
After this conversation, she does, in fact, make a greater effort to respond positively to Adèle. Jane tells the reader, "I was disposed to appreciate all that was good in her to the utmost" (148). However, Jane still seems annoyed with Adèle's frivolousness and continues to point out her vanity and superficiality throughout most of her interactions with her. Jane characterizes Adèle's faults as "some little freedoms and trivialities into which she was apt to stray when much noticed; and which betrayed in her a superficiality of character, inherited probably from her mother, hardly congenial to an English mind" (148). What Jane fails to see is that Rochester's treatment of Adèle, objectifying her and offering her material goods in place of affection and acceptance, encourages superficiality. Furthermore, Rochester and Jane have both discounted Adèle as having "no talents" and have dismissed any possibility that Adèle could have any genuine thoughts or character traits to offer. What Jane dismisses as French defects of character are probably traits that Adèle has learned through her early life with her mother, but also through her interactions with others at Thornfield. Adèle's life has taught her that her value lies solely in being pretty and pleasing.
After Jane leaves Thornfield and Rochester sends Adèle to school, apparently “a sound English education” either teaches Adèle that her value is not solely comprised of beauty or charm or perhaps teaches her that she has no value at all. The latter seems to be the case at the school where Jane finds her after Jane has settled at Ferndean. Jane describes Adèle’s condition at this school, stating, “She looked pale and thin: she was not happy. I found the rules of the establishment were too strict, its course of study too severe, for a child of her age” (458). Jane decides that teaching Adèle herself is not a practical option since, she says, “my time and cares were now required by another—my husband needed them all” (458), and so she chooses a more appropriate school for Adèle. Perhaps this next school does teach her to value her own mind, since Jane tells us Adèle “became very happy there, and made fair progress in her studies” (458). Through learning to be less vain, or perhaps simply more English, Adèle is finally able to win Jane’s approval and acceptance, for Jane states, “when she left school, I found in her a pleasing companion: docile, good-tempered, and well-principled. By her grateful attention to me and mine, she has long since repaid any little kindness I ever had it in my power to offer her” (458). While Jane has prized self-
determination and assertiveness in herself throughout the novel, Adèle seems to gain her acceptance only by becoming more submissive. Interestingly, Jane’s statement of acceptance portrays Adèle as a very proper English girl, one who knows her place in a patriarchal society.

In most respects Jane Eyre is certainly a strong feminist heroine. Her position as an orphan girl in Victorian England puts her in a unique position to subvert patriarchal values of male dominance and female dependence. Her mere survival in the absence of male protection undermines this ideology of female dependence. However, she does more than simply survive. She gains strong relationships with other women, provides for herself and eventually thrives financially, and finds a voice in which she can express her own values and assert her own will. For these reasons, Jane Eyre does embody the character of an admirable, feminist heroine. However, she is a decidedly imperfect heroine. While she does offer guidance to Adèle and eventually offers her compassion and some measure of affection, she only truly offers Adèle a sense of belonging after Adèle has conformed to Jane’s standards, and in fact, seemingly, to the values of a patriarchal society. While such flaws as this do make Jane a more realistic character, they are in some measure disappointing.
It seems, then, that while Charlotte Brontë did create a strong feminist heroine, she did not create a heroine who should serve as a perfect model.
Conclusion

In the end it seems that both Austen and Brontë created reasonably strong but realistically flawed feminist heroines in their young female wards. While Fanny is not often seen as the best example of a feminist heroine, she does achieve some measure of independence in her persistent reliance upon her own judgment in choosing a marriage partner in spite of the patriarchal pressure forced upon her. She is able to achieve this independence at least in part because of her role as Sir Thomas' neglected ward and the consequent loosening of her ties of duty and gratitude to patriarchy. Sadly, at the same time, the abuse she suffers and her lack of acceptance and support cause the already shy Fanny to respond with increased timidity and insecurity, making it difficult for Fanny to develop a strong sense of self-confidence and assertiveness and undermining her ability to stand up for herself.

While Fanny's ability to gain independence for herself may be compromised, she does, however, recognize the significance of developing positive relationships with other women to help give them support. In the one relationship in which Fanny has a position of leadership and in which she is responsible for setting the tone, her relationship with Susan, she shows a remarkable ability to demonstrate affection and
support. In spite of her own lack of female mentors, she is able to overcome any discomfort she initially feels with the differences between herself and Susan and offer her sister much needed love and guidance.

Jane, conversely, is typically celebrated as one of the strongest feminist characters in the canon of women's literature because of her display of remarkable assertiveness and independence from patriarchal authority. She is able to achieve this independence in part because of the absence of a patriarch in her early childhood and also in part, as Rich suggests, because of the support she receives from other women. However, while Jane does demonstrate an ability to form strong bonds with women in peer relationships that involve mutual support and in relationships in which Jane is being mentored, when Jane serves as the supporter and guide in her relationship with Adèle, she does not fare as well. Jane's difficulty in offering acceptance to Adèle seems to relate directly to Jane's discomfort with the differences between herself and Adèle and with her inability to see past those differences. While Jane is eventually able to offer Adèle some support and guidance, her difficulty in accepting Adèle makes her a less-than-perfect mentor. Interestingly, then, these two characters placed in similar childhood
situations display opposing strengths and weaknesses in the very two qualities that define a feminist heroine. Fanny, while somewhat independent, seems better at nurturing others than asserting her own independence. Jane, while somewhat supportive of other women, seems better at achieving independence for herself than nurturing other women.

Too often society views these two categories as mutually exclusive: to be independent and assertive a woman must be somehow hardened and isolated, and to be nurturing she must be self-denying and submissive. As Rich notes, the truest sense of feminism is achieved when these two categories are combined. Women are best able to achieve independence from patriarchy when they join together to form supportive relationships with one another. Women are able to provide the best sort of nurturing for other women when they are able to provide examples of assertiveness to guide those women they nurture. Although these two heroines to some extent demonstrate limitations in meeting one of the two criteria, the fact that both are able to achieve some sense of personal independence and provide some type of support for other women even within the strongly patriarchal society of nineteenth century England suggests the possibility that both qualities can be united in one person. For these reasons, while Jane
Austen and Charlotte Brontë may not have created perfect feminist heroines, they did create characters that helped to establish a feminist tradition that incorporated, at least to some extent, both personal freedom and female solidarity. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, women authors such as Olive Schreiner and L.M. Montgomery would follow up on these themes in their own portrayals of female orphans.
Works Cited


